

X3
57
ZP
1141

A LETTER TO PRESBYTERIANS.

NO. II.

M. H. HOUSTON.

RK
55
ZP
NO.38

A LETTER TO PRESBYTERIANS

NO. II.

M. H. HOUSTON

A LETTER TO PRESBYTERIANS.

II.

When I sent out a letter to my fellow members of the Presbyterian household not long ago, I did not think I would repeat this act soon. But the letter called forth expressions of various kinds from brethren in the church, and these impel me to write again. I devoutly thank God our Saviour for the work He is working among us by his Spirit. I have long had confidence that the presence of the Spirit will be realized in the Presbyterian church with an ever increasing power, bringing many into a region of abundant life and joy. If among the multiplied agencies which the Lord is employing to accomplish this end He shall be pleased to use these letters, I shall be grateful indeed.

The fulness of blessing with us must always depend on the fidelity with which sin is judged by us. In connection with this fact I called attention in the former letter to the necessity of discipline for sin. Unless there be faithful obedience to the clear, repeated commands of God in this matter, the church can have no true success. But the statements of the letter drew forth an answer from an earnest brother, who wrote me that a chief cause of the failure of our church courts to exercise discipline for sin is the difficulty of securing testimony; witnesses are often unwilling to testify; and then, as though it were to illustrate this, there appeared in the Presbyterian Standard of June 4 an editorial calling favorable attention to the action of a prominent witness who maintained secrecy in a case of gross sin. It was a case which occurred in the high places of our church, and was mentioned in my letter. It came before one of our presbyteries for investigation. In the editorial referred to a fact in the case emerges not before published. An eminent minister of the church was a witness of the sin of his brother. He caused the brother to resign his position, "and then," says the editorial, "it was agreed that the secret should be kept," and so he afterwards "with the whole might and weight of his supreme influence in the church, shielded and protected the other."

As a part of the protection thus granted there was an occurrence which is not specified in the editorial. When the case was before the presbyterial court for investigation the minister of supreme influence declined to make a statement about it. His covering up of the matter, as far as his influence could reach, is presented in the editorial as an evidence of goodness, and he is characterized as "the good man."

The title of this eminent servant of God to be called a good man is unquestioned. He has passed away from among us to be with the Lord, and it is a day of tearful memories. But God is no respecter of persons, nor are we concerned now with persons; we are concerned with principles. I wish to say therefore, as in the presence of God, that the promise to keep secret a gross sin, followed by a refusal to make a statement concerning it before a court of the Lord Jesus, is not goodness; it is itself a sin. It is sin of a character that affects the life and honor of the church. There is sore need that in every part and corner of the church it be recognized and treated as sin.

LAWS OF WITNESS BEARING.

The laws of witness bearing were given by God to men through Moses. They are accepted as binding in all Christendom. Our Lord, in a wonderful passage, accepted them as binding on himself (John 8: 17. 18). He directed that, in a case of discipline, they should be observed (Matt. 18: 16). The Apostle Paul declared that, in cases of discipline he himself expected to observe them, (2 Cor. 13: 1). But according to these laws it is a grave offence for a man who is a witness to refuse to give testimony before a court. The law says: "And if any one sin, in that he heareth the voice of adjuration, he being a witness, whether he hath seen or known, if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5: 1 R. V.). In Leviticus 19: 8 we see that the phrase "shall bear his iniquity" is equivalent to "shall be cut off from among his people"--that is, shall be suspended from the fellowship of the church. If an officer in the army sees a brother officer commit a gross breach of law and promises to keep the matter secret, and then, when he is called to testify in the case before a court martial, declines to make a statement, how will he be dealt with? How long will he be allowed to retain his rank? In the humblest magistrate's court in the land, if a witness refuses to testify what he knows, how long is it before the hand of the law

is laid upon him? No promise of secrecy is here of any force. It was unlawful, and does not bind. And is a court of the Lord Jesus Christ of less dignity, of less authority, than a court martial or a magistrate's court? It has not indeed authority over those who are outside the church, but it has authority over those who are within (1 Cor. 5: 12, 13); and if any officer or any member of the church, who is a witness, refuses to testify before the court, it is the duty of the court to point out to him the gravity of the offence, and if he then persists in his refusal, the court should take action according to God's command. Of course, if the offender belongs to the jurisdiction of another court, the matter should be reported to it for action. In no other way can the honor of the church of the Lord Jesus be maintained.

MISTAKEN GOODNESS.

Ought it not to be understood everywhere that, when gross sin is committed in the church, it is no part of goodness to cover it up? There are minor transgressions which may and should be dealt with in private: but when it comes to the flagrant sins mentioned in 1 Cor. 5: 11, secrecy is not kindness. The divine command, the word of love, is not to cover; it is to judge. In the early history of the world there was no civil government, and the murderer went unpunished by man; there was no church government, and the drunkard went unjudged. But God, in his great kindness, has now given us government both in state and in church. The object of government in the church is to be clearly kept in view: it is "for edification, not for destruction." The design of its discipline is to save, not to crush. But to save how? The answer is given by Paul—"for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The flesh is the self life. "In me—that is, in my flesh," says Paul. When gross sin appears in the church, it is not of sudden origin; it is the product of a long and generally a slow growth; it is the result of a protracted indulgence of self, the flesh. The exposure of the sin, the humiliation and pain, which church discipline brings, is God's appointed means for causing the sinner to hate his self life and renounce it—to abhor the flesh and "even the garment spotted by the flesh," and to destroy it. So discipline, though most painful, is most merciful. Its object is to crush not the sinner, but the sinner's self life, that the life of Christ may be received instead: and so the spirit of the erring man is saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

No man is worthy to be a ruler and teacher in the church—nay, no man is worthy to be a disciple of Christ, unless he hate the self life wherever found, whether in himself or in others. Jesus says: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14: 26). There are men who hate their own self life and are willing to crucify it at any cost of pain, and yet shrink back and are unwilling to inflict similar pain on those dearest to them. It is not such men as these the Lord wishes as rulers in his church. He chose the men of Levi to be the teachers of the church because they had proved themselves willing to inflict discipline on those closest to their hearts; "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; for they have observed thy word and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law" (Deut. 33: 9, 10). Is it not such men as these the Lord Jesus desires in his church now? And it will always be found that the highest righteousness and the tenderest love go hand in hand. Even the best fiction of the English language bears witness to this. The Jennie Deans who, with unfaltering truth, spoke the evidence in court which condemned her sister to death, was the same Jennie Deans who traveled afoot the long road from Edinburgh to London, and by her melting entreaty obtained a pardon from the sovereign, saving her sister's life.

May the Spirit of truth and wisdom and courage fill every court of our Church!

To prevent sin is a nobler task than to judge sin. The Holy Spirit has been given us that we may obey God's commands, and the fulness of the Spirit means the highest obedience. It is with pleasure, therefore, I observe in the issue of the Standard to which I have referred an editorial exhorting the church to be filled with the Spirit. I called attention in my former letter to language used by the Standard in regard to "the enduement with power theory," which implied that this enduement was for the apostolic age, not for ours. I pointed out the fact that in the New Testament the enduement with power is the same as being filled with the Spirit. The Editor has since disclaimed the meaning which his language conveyed, and while he has not made clear what he did mean, I gladly accept the disclaimer. I am sure that

the fine talents which he possesses cannot be used to greater advantage than in bringing the church to what Paul describes as "the fulness of the blessing of Christ."

METHODS OF POWER.

It is important for us to understand that we may talk much about the fulness of the Spirit and even pray much for this fulness, and yet not be filled with the Spirit. A man may talk much about bodily health and may pray much for it, but unless he conform to the laws of the body which God has revealed in his word and works he will not enjoy health. God answers prayer by opening our eyes to see his methods of power and blessing. May I be allowed to state here the simple, yet important, methods by which the fulness of the Spirit is obtained?

First, there must be a deep, thorough hatred of the self life, as was mentioned above. "If any man come to me," says our Lord, "and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple." The self life, the flesh, is altogether bad. "In me—that is, in my flesh"—says Paul, "dwelleth no good thing." God made me for himself, that I might love him and please him by doing his wise commandments. Instead of loving him, I loved self; instead of pleasing him, I turned my back on him and pleased self. He gave me many rich gifts that I might use them in his service. I violated the trust and used them for self. Instead of spreading life and blessing around me in the world, I spread evil and death. I was both a robber and a murderer. God brought to me his well beloved Son and entreated me to receive him as master, and give up self. I said, Away with the Christ; and I chose self, the robber and murderer. "The mind of the flesh," says Paul, "is enmity against God" (R. V.). By whatever name it be called—self, the flesh, the old man—it does wickedness always and nothing but wickedness. The list of its works given by Paul includes seventeen horrible sins, and then is incomplete (Gal. 5: 19, 21). In describing men in the church who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, the first thing Paul says about them is that they are lovers of self (II Tim. 3: 2 R. V.). The first thing then in order to have the power of the Spirit is to be a hater of self—that is, a hater of the flesh, the old man.

Second, the self life must be altogether renounced; the flesh must be crucified; the old man must be put off. "If any man will come after me," says our Lord, "let him deny himself"—renounce

self, is the strong expression in the Greek. "Put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man" (R. V.). And how may this be done? We answer, by faith in Christ alone. We receive him that he may do it all for us. He is our sanctification, our life, as he is our justification, our righteousness (1 Cor. 1: 30). He sent his Spirit to dwell in us, and by the Spirit we were baptized into him and made members of his body (Rom. 8: 9. 1 Cor. 12: 13). In his body our old self, our old man, was crucified and buried, and it was put away when he rose from the dead. "Knowing this that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Rom. 6: 6 R. V.). Christ in his risen body now imparts to us his pure, holy resurrection life, that we may "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6: 4).

What then is our attitude towards the flesh, the old man? The only honest attitude of a Christian is to say in truth, I hate it, I renounce it, I am done with it, I reckon myself dead to it and all its sin. This is just what God commands. "Even so reckon ye also your selves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6: 11 R. V.). And when God commands us to reckon anything as ours, we have only to go forward in faith and we find that it is ours. When Israel crossed the Jordan under Joshua, they were called to reckon the land of Canaan as theirs and every enemy as conquered. All they had to do was to go forward, and God said that every place that the sole of their foot should tread upon would be theirs. Not all the land would be possessed in a day, nor every enemy destroyed at once; but every day and all the day long they might be victors—always advancing, always conquering. Just so with the flesh or any other enemy of our life. Its power was utterly broken when Jesus rose from the dead. Whenever it now shows itself, by faith in him there may be victory over it. The exalted Christ, who has all power, triumphs in us, and the life that is presented as realized in the New Testament is, the flesh put away, Christ our life; "Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man." "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh." "No longer I, but Christ liveth in me." "To me to live is Christ."

Then third, we must be dead to law. How many Christians are there who understand what this means? The most subtle form of self is the religious self life; it is when the Christian tries in

his own strength, the flesh, to imitate Christ. The command comes to him from above, "Follow me"—the command which embraces all law—and he rises in his own strength to obey. He makes resolutions, he prays, he reads his Bible and does other like things, all good in themselves, without perceiving that it is he himself, his own self-effort, that is struggling to obey the command; it is in the flesh he is trying to keep the law. The result is failure. The good that he would do he does not, and the evil that he would not he does. He has not learned the truth that, by his union with the body of Christ, he has become dead to the law; that as it was without his strivings under law Christ justified him, so it is without such strivings Christ sanctifies him. It is when Paul is teaching the Christ life, sanctification, he emphasizes the truth of our being dead to law. "Therefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." In a word, Paul stakes our whole moral and spiritual life on our union with Christ, apart from law. The law is of use to show us what the Christ life is and what it is not; but the law is powerless to give us strength to do what is right, and the flesh, self, is helpless to do anything save what is wrong. Only Christ in us fulfills the law. Apart from him we can do nothing. He is our sanctification.

And then, lastly, since Christ, who is our life, is almighty, there must be no limit set to the fulness of his blessing in us while we are on earth. With men it is impossible to cleanse from all unrighteousness, but with God all things are possible. When Paul prays for the highest spiritual blessings, he utters praise that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. When he speaks of his success in overcoming the temptations of poverty and of abundance, he says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." And so in various places.

I find but one restriction in the New Testament as regards our present spiritual life: no man may rightfully claim sinless perfection. The reason of this is that no man should pretend to a perfect knowledge of his own heart. It is the prerogative of God alone to search the inmost recesses of the heart and know all its

hidden things. A man may state everything that his consciousness reveals to him; he cannot go further. So Paul, though he declared that he was conscious of nothing wrong in his life and rejoiced in the testimony of his conscience that he was living in holiness and godly sincerity, refused to judge himself as sinless. "I know (am conscious of) nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God." (I Cor. 4: 4, 5, R. V. II Cor. 1: 12).

WHICH SHALL OCCUPY?

I think we must see now what an important thing it is to be filled with the Spirit. Self, the flesh, has robbed God and spread death around in the world. It is Barabbas, the condemned felon. The choice we have to make is, Which shall be crucified, the robber or Christ, self or our Saviour, the flesh or the Son of God? May we say that we will retain some of the flesh and take some of Christ? that part of the room in our life shall be for the robber, the remaining part shall be for our Lord? As long as the robber is allowed to dwell there at all, the Spirit of Christ cannot fill us. How then can a true-hearted Christian hesitate for a moment? Away with the flesh! Crucify it! Let it be buried forever out of sight! Let Christ alone live in us and fill us! This is what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We come then again to the question, Why is it that the Presbyterian Church does not teach the fulness of the Spirit? The fact that, as a church, she does not teach this is only too apparent. I stated in the former letter that our Committee of Publication in Richmond, during the forty years of its service, has not issued a book or pamphlet that sets forth the fulness of the Spirit, showing men how the blessing may be obtained; and further, that in the books on the Spirit and holiness which the Committee has issued the authors do not so much as mention the fulness of the Spirit. I also called attention to the fact that the bulky volume of Dr. Kuyper on The Work of the Holy Spirit, which has been recommended for use in our theological seminaries, does not even notice the texts of the New Testament on the fulness of the Spirit. To extend our view let one other case be mentioned. A letter was written to the Presbyterian Board of Publi-

cation in Philadelphia asking whether there were any books issued by them which teach the fulness of the Spirit. An answer came that they were "pleased to send herewith a list of works on the blessing of being filled with the Spirit." The list was not long, only four works, and they were all ordered. When they arrived and were examined, not one of them was found to mention the blessing of being filled with the Spirit.

The leading book on the list was Owen on the Holy Spirit. John Owen, as many who read these lines know, lived at the time when the Westminster Assembly met. He was a noble and learned man as well as a voluminous writer. Yet John Owen knew as little about the fulness of the Spirit as he knew about Foreign Missions. Andrew Murray, who is of the Presbyterian household of our day—Dutch Reformed, educated in Scotland and Holland—is as far in advance of Owen in his teaching on the Holy Spirit as the Ecumenical Council which met in New York two years ago was in advance of the Westminster Assembly in the knowledge of Foreign Missions. Still it is not supposed that Andrew Murray, whose life has been as abounding in practical good as his books are rich in spiritual truth, has written the final lines of teaching on the power and blessing of the Spirit, nor are such lines likely to be written by any man of the generation now passing off the stage of earthly action: just as no man of the generation now closing has written the final word on the methods and possibilities of the Foreign Mission work. But the blessing of Christ has been on Murray, and his blessing has been on every man of this generation who, with honest purpose, has sought to attain, and to bring others to attain, the New Testament methods of life and power, humbly refusing to be discouraged, whatever might be the difficulties or the failures either within or without. May we not all bind ourselves together as one brotherhood, under the guidance of the Spirit and the Word, to reach these noble heights of service?

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION.

We must return then to the question, Why has not the Presbyterian church taught the fulness of the Spirit? In answer to this question I have no hesitation in declaring my own full conviction: it is because she has taught that the flesh, the old man, is not renounced, is not put off, but abides always as an active part of our life on earth. When the old man occupies part of the

room, Christ cannot by his Spirit occupy the whole room: we cannot be filled with the Spirit. The Confession of Faith (Chapter XIII, Section II) says of "the whole man" in this life, "There abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;" and in support of this statement four texts are cited. One of them is Gal. 5:17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Let us look at this text.

But how shall we look at it? Apart from its context? That is the way, I think, the Confession looks at it; but there is great danger in this. A single sentence detached from a statement may be used to convey a meaning widely different from that which the whole statement conveys. Let us take an illustration. Mr. B., a good man, has a son who wishes to do right, but who is too much under the evil influence of X.. This X. is an unclean rascal, who lodges and works in the courthouse. Mr. B. writes an earnest note to his son, in which he says: "I tell you this, if you keep company with me, you will not do all the bad things that X. does. For X. draws you one way by his influence, I draw you another way: we are contrary to each other, and the result is you don't do the right things you wish. But if you associate with me, you don't go to the courthouse. See how bad the works of that man X. are! See how pure and just my life is! Against such a life the courthouse has no law. And my true children have put away X. as though he were a criminal condemned and hanged. So you live with me and associate with me."

All this is plain and practical. But suppose that the son is found habitually associating with X. and doing some of his bad works, and when he is charged with this, he replies: "Yes, this is just what my father wrote me. He said in his letter, 'X. draws you one way by his influence and I draw you another way; we are contrary to each other, and the result is you don't do the right things you wish.' Yes, my father wrote a true sentence there. My troubles with X. are continual and inevitable." Will anyone say that the son has made a right use of the sentence quoted from his father's note? Why, the whole purpose of the note was to show him that he might be rid of X. and associate only

with his father, living a pure and just life. Now let us for X., the rascal, substitute the flesh; for the courthouse, let us substitute law; for the good father, let us take the Holy Spirit. Here is what the Holy Spirit says to the Galatian Christians in the earnest letter of Paul:

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, hatred, etc. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, etc.: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

What then is the teaching of this entire passage? It is that the Christian who walks in the Spirit does not fulfil the lust of the flesh, that he has nailed the flesh to the cross, that he is led by the Spirit and lives in the Spirit, and he is not under law. It is when he is under law, as Paul constantly teaches, the flesh is active, lusting against the Spirit; and it is self-effort under the law “Follow Me” which is attended with the experience that he cannot do the things that he would. “But,” adds Paul emphatically, if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” So the conclusion of the whole matter is, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

A CONTRAST.

Is it not apparent then that the Confession has made a grave error in quoting a detached verse from this passage? Paul teaches that the flesh is nailed to the cross; here the Confession teaches that the flesh is always making an active fight. Paul teaches that the place in which the flesh is active is under the law, and if we are led by the Spirit we move out from this place; the Confession here gives no intimation of the blessed result of being led out from under law. “The continual and irreconcilable war” of which the Confession speaks, in which the flesh, “the remaining corruption, for a time may much prevail,” is the battle of Rephidim, fought at the foot of Mount Sinai—a stubborn fight, with varying fortunes; sometimes Amalek prevailing, sometimes Israel prevailing. The war which Paul presents is the battle of

Gibeon, fought on territory outside the wilderness of law, in which Israel strikes the enemy at daybreak, chases him in rout all the day long, and the day is made longer that the spoils of victory may be gathered in. The warfare of the conflict here presented in the Confession is on a minor key: "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." The warfare of Paul rings with the major notes of continual victory: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "Thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." There is a supply of the Spirit in the wilderness of law, but it is a single stream flowing down from the smitten rock to the desert sands; but there is beyond the wilderness a land that drinketh water of the rain of heaven, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths springing forth in valleys and hills. Here it is that men may find in this life fullness of blessing.

In noting this contrast I do not mean that the Confession omits under other statements to cite as proofs the texts which teach the believer's deadness to law and his crucifixion of the flesh; nor do I mean that the Confession presents no statements which may be unfolded and explained to teach the believer's highest sanctification in this life. But I mean this: whatever proof texts are cited elsewhere, or whatever statements are made elsewhere, by the Confession, they are all affected and limited by the statement of Chapter XIII, Section II, from which I have quoted, and by the interpretation of the texts cited in support of it. The section presents indeed an experience of the regenerated man, but it is of one who is striving to keep the law; it is an experience marked with failure and sin, and the section declares that this experience is continual in the present life. The Spirit is present to help, but the flesh is active and lusting, and the Spirit has not entire possession. There is no fulness of the Spirit.

THE STRUGGLE UNDER LAW PORTRAYED.

The truth of this matter is made yet clearer when we consider another of the four texts cited by the Confession—Rom. VII: 18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do;" and so on. The whole passage is well known. What is Paul here talking about? What is his aim? To answer these questions we must, I say

again, look at the context. Not to study the whole context thoroughly may betray us into serious error. So important is this that I beg leave again to use an illustration. Let us go back to the case already supposed of the son of Mr. B.. We saw him wishing to do right and please his father, yet failing constantly because he went to the courthouse, where X, the rascal, stays, and associated with him. Now suppose that the son cuts loose entirely from the courthouse and X., never goes near them, but associates only with his good father and lives like him. At the end of three years he writes a letter to a young brother, and gives his experience. Here is what he writes:

"If we wish to do right, we must keep away from the courthouse, and associate with our father. When I associated with X. in the courthouse, I did all sorts of wickedness. But now I keep away from the courthouse, and I live a new life. Do I mean that the courthouse is a bad place? Not at all: the courthouse and the laws regulating it are all right. The trouble is with X.. In him dwells no good thing; and when I allow myself to be in the courthouse, he is constantly active to lead me astray, and I always do wrong. I know that I ought to do right, but he is so plausible! I wish to do good, but I am tripped up and I do evil. It is a pleasure to me to think of my father and his life, but the association with X. puts me under bondage; I am a slave to his influence. The result is I am wretched. I thank God this is so; this is God's way of saving me. So then you understand the situation; by my conscience and intellect I am bound to my father, by my association with X. I am bound to sin. There is therefore no censure for us when we stay in our father's home. The life here has made me free from the life of sin and death."

This is all plain enough; but suppose now that the young brother, after receiving this letter, is found doing some of the bad things that X. does; and when a friend speaks to him of this, he replies: "Yes, I know I do badly every day, but I can't be better than my older brother. He wrote me that he was always being tripped up and made to do evil; that he wished to do good, but he was really under bondage to X. and was a slave to his influence. He was bound to sin." "But," says the friend, "your brother was speaking to you of his past experience; that was three years ago." "No," replies the young man, "how can you say it was past? Don't you see he uses the present tense? He says, 'I wish to do

good and evil is present with me. The association with X. puts me under bondage; I am a slave to his influence." "Ah," says the friend, "if that is the meaning you got from the letter, you have read it wrong. Your brother said distinctly that that experience was past, and that he is now living a new life. I advise you to read the whole letter again, and read it carefully." So may I not ask that we all read the 7th chapter of Romans, with the opening verses of the 8th, chapter once more, and read with care?

Having read the 7th Chapter carefully, note the features which stand out clear and distinct—the evident headlands of this passage in God's word. 1. The key words of the chapter are law and flesh. Thy occur 26 times in it. 2. On the forefront of the chapter is the impressive declaration that we must become as dead to law as a woman is to her husband who lies in the grave, that we may be united to Christ and, by this union, live a holy, fruitful life (vv. 1-4). 3. Then we have Paul's statement that when he was trying in the flesh to keep the law, the result was fatal; now that he is freed from law, he says, he serves in newness of spirit. The struggle of the flesh under law was with him a thing of the past (vv. 5, 6). 4. The failure of the struggle under law is no fault of the law. The law is holy and just and good; the whole trouble is from sin, the product of the flesh. "The law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, carnal, sold under sin." When self has the throne, there is a tyranny of woe. (vv. 7-14). 5. The activities of the flesh under law are displayed. The Christian under law sees that the commandment is good; he delights in the law of God after the inward man; he wishes to obey, and he strives in the flesh, his own strength, to obey. The result is failure, and then follows a repetitious round of effort and failure, effort and failure, effort and failure, like the circuitous, wearisome journeys of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. (vv. 15-23). The result is a cry of wretchedness, a cry for deliverance. Paul thanks God for such a result. Here is self despair and looking away from self. So then the whole condition of the Christian under law is stated in a sentence: with the mind, the perceptive faculty, he approves, he serves, the law of God: with the flesh he serves the law of sin. (vv. 24, 25). So ends the Seventh Chapter.

ANOTHER CONTRAST.

Then in the opening verses of the Eighth Chapter what a contrast! Did we say that the key words of the Seventh Chapter are law and flesh? Here the key words are Spirit and life; they occur

18 times in the first 16 verses. The struggle of the man in the Seventh Chapter extorted a cry for deliverance from sin and death; here we see the deliverance already come: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." In the Seventh Chapter the man said, "I am fleshly, carnal, sold under sin: now we see him walking "not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." In the Seventh Chapter we see him struggling to keep the law and failing; that was the best he could do. Now we see God's best, not man's; God, through his Son, has done a work "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." To fulfil the righteousness of the law is the highest obedience, and the highest obedience comes by the fulness of the Spirit.

The Confession of Faith presents the struggle of the man in the Seventh Chapter as the continual experience of the Christian in this life. On the passage portraying the struggle (vv. 15-25), from which the Confession takes its proof text, I would remark:

1. It is the most egotistical passage in the Bible. The first personal pronoun, I, my, me, occurs 37 times in 11 verses.
2. It is the direct antithesis of the renunciation of self, the ego, so concisely, yet fully, stated in Gal. 2: 19, 20—"I through the law died unto the law, that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." Which may be paraphrased: I through my failures under law died to the law, that I might live unto God. I, self, the flesh, have been crucified with Christ: not that my personality has been effaced; as a person I yet live; and yet it is no longer self living, it is Christ living in me.
3. In the early centuries of the church, when Christians knew what it is to be filled with the Spirit, the church generally regarded the passage as showing the struggles of a man under law. "It appears," says Dr. Charles Hodge, "that during the first three centuries the fathers were generally agreed in considering the passage as descriptive of the experience of one yet under the law." O that Dr. Hodge had agreed with the fathers of the first three centuries! Then he might have taught, as they did, the fulness of the Holy Spirit causing obedience to God's commands.
4. The Presbyterian and the Methodist contended over this passage. The Presbyterian said, This is the experience of Paul as a Christian, and it is continual in this life. The Methodist said, This is the experience of Paul before he became a Christian, and he speaks

of it as a past experience from which he was delivered, Each side was half right and half wrong. It is the experience of a Christian indeed, but it is the experience of a Christian under law; and it is not a continual experience, but a past experience from which the Christian was delivered when he "through the law died unto law." Or perhaps some may prefer the more comprehensive statement of the matter as made by the eminent preacher and theological professor of the Baptist Church, Dr. John A. Broadus, who, in his lifetime, was honored in all the churches. He says: "In this remarkable passage in the Seventh Chapter of Romans the Apostle first points out what is the best the law can do to make a man holy: what is the best that a man can do in the way of becoming holy by just trying to do what is right, simply trying in his own strength to do what he learns from God's law to be right. * * * There has been a good deal of controversy between what are called Calvinists and what are called Arminians, as to whether this passage gives the experience of a renewed or of an unrenewed man. I think the truth is, as some recent writers have been showing, that it does not really give either, but gives the experience of any man, either renewed or unrenewed, who is looking to the law to make him holy. Renewed men often fall back on that." To fall back on that, I may remark, is what Paul designates as "falling from grace" (Gal. 5: 4). 5. No Christian can deliver himself from these self efforts to do right—the unhappy struggle of the flesh under law. He must look entirely outside of himself for deliverance. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Only the almighty power of the Spirit bringing to him the full life of Christ can deliver. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that makes free. The fulness of the Spirit means the fulness of life and freedom.

THE WILDERNESS OF LAW.

I have now shown the reason, I believe, why the Presbyterian church has not taught the fulness of the Holy Spirit. The struggle that we have just reviewed, whether as briefly sketched in the Epistle to the Galatians or more fully pictured in the Seventh of Romans, is always located in the wilderness of law. To continue in that wilderness is to fail in reaching the territory of the fulness of blessing. The men who hear the voice of God speaking to them there are God's redeemed people. They have come out of Egypt; they have quit the world. But in the camp in which they dwell there is strife and envy and murmuring, the idolatry of gold and

fleshly lust,—what we call in this day “a low state of religion,” the phrase used by our last General Assembly as it contemplated the present condition of the church and summoned us to a day of fasting and prayer. In the wilderness there was no circumcision (Josh. 5: 5)—no, “putting off of the body of the flesh” (Col. 2: 11 R. V.), and the flesh was always active in evil. How earnestly the Holy Spirit in the New Testament strives to bring Christians out of this state! How pathetic and solemn the appeal made to them in the Third and Fourth Chapters of Hebrews, not to continue in the wilderness as their fathers did, but to come out into the land of victory and rest! The late Dr. John W. Pratt, widely known as an able preacher of our own church, in his published sermon on the text, “Ye are not under law, but under grace,” declared that, “if all Christians could apprehend this truth, the whole complexion of the church would be changed.” It was a true utterance; and the Lord Christ is now looking into the heart of every reader of these lines, as he looks into the heart of the writer, to see whether we have really ceased from our own efforts under law (Heb. 4: 10), whether we honestly abhor the flesh and have crucified it, and whether we rest in Christ alone as our sanctification and life, believing that through him we can do all things. Shall we not everyone hasten to enter into this rest?

And then as to the statements in the Confessional standards which leave the Christian in a continual struggle under law, with failure and sin; what shall be done about them? No one, I believe, is more grateful to God than the writer of these lines for what has been accomplished by the fathers in the church for the establishment of truth. There is a heritage of great value that has come to us from the generations that are past. When some vital doctrine of God’s word seemed in danger from the assaults of enemies, or when such a doctrine had become almost lost in the darkness and rubbish of the age, there were men raised up by God who grasped the imperilled truth, and by patient study, with conflict and toil, recovered it for the church, defined its full and just proportions, and expressed the definition with fitting words in credal form. So the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the doctrine of God’s electing grace and of man’s free will, the doctrine of justification by faith and other doctrines, have come to us in statements whose exactness and power we admire, and for which we thank God.

But since the close of the first three centuries—the centuries

ways, for his eyes are upon it from the beginning of the year unto the end.

Faithfully, in His name,
M. H. HOUSTON.

Waynesboro, Va.

July, 1902.

The writer will be pleased to hear from anyone who may feel prompted to write to him in regard to the matter presented in the above letter. Persons wishing copies of the letter may address him, Waynesboro Virginia, stating the number of copies desired.

